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Hahl, Kaisa

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Kaisa Hahl

*University of Helsinki, Finland*, [kaisa.hahl@helsinki.fi](mailto:kaisa.hahl@helsinki.fi)

Heini Paavola

*University of Helsinki, Finland*

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## **“To Get a Foot in the Door”: New Host Country Educated Immigrant Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Employability in Finland**

Kaisa Hahl  
Heini Paavola  
University of Helsinki, Finland

*Abstract: This article sets out to find factors that promote or hinder employment opportunities for immigrant teachers educated in the host country. The data were collected through online questionnaires and focus group discussions among two student cohorts. After a year of graduating from English-medium teacher education in Finland, the employment situations ranged from full-time permanent teaching posts in Finland to unemployment. Although the majority was successful in securing at least some work, no one was teaching in mainstream classrooms in a Finnish-medium school. The scope of teaching qualifications and references from substitutions were considered factors for employment. Lacking “strong enough” Finnish skills or native English skills was experienced as the main hindrances to employment. Although generally the participants did not perceive their nationality a hindrance to employment, ‘nativeness’ in certain languages seemed to play a role. Being a native English (or sometimes another major language) speaker promoted job opportunities in international schools.*

### **Introduction**

Societies and labour markets enjoy increased diversity but employment is distributed unequally between different population groups. Immigration has grown around the world but immigrants continue to have higher unemployment than the original population (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010). Generally, a lack of various resources, such as language skills, education, work experience, social relationships and networks, is raised as explanation or excuse for immigrants’ weaker employment status (Liu, 2007; George, Ghaze, Brennenstuhl, & Fuller-Thomson, 2012)—in addition to employers’ lack of trust toward immigrant workers and negative attitudes and prejudices in society (Heath & Cheung, 2007).

Although Finland is a relatively new immigration destination country, it has experienced rapid growth in foreign-born residents in the past decades. What makes the context relevant for readers elsewhere is that Finland’s situation is similar to other small population countries that have had few ethnic minorities of their own but now deal with a population that is increasingly multicultural and multilingual. As both of Finland’s official languages (Finnish and Swedish) are small on a global scale, the immigrant experience in Finland is comparable to that in countries where immigrants typically have little prior familiarity with the local language.

The ensuing demographic changes from the growth in immigration are seen and felt, among others, in schools. The schools are in need of teachers with immigrant backgrounds in order for the school staff to mirror the demographics of society and include both visible and

invisible minorities (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). This article sets out to learn how first generation immigrant teachers—recently graduated from English-medium teacher education in Finland—have gained employment and how they have experienced job search in the host country. The study uses questionnaires and focus groups with two cohorts of students to find out the respondents' perceptions of their employability and answers to the research question: What factors promote or hinder employment for a new immigrant teacher educated in the host country?

### **Immigrants in the Finnish Labour Market**

Immigration in Finland has escalated since the 1980s. In 1990, this Nordic country had 26,000 foreign citizens. By the end of 2012 there were close to 5.5 million inhabitants in Finland of whom 280,000 were of foreign origin (first and second generation immigrants). Nearly one out of ten 25–34-year-old residents are of immigrant background and the growing trend is expected to continue (OSF, 2012). Reasons for increased immigration can partly be found in the changed immigration policy after Finland joined the European Union in 1995. The main motives for migration to Finland correspond to the usual reasons: family, study or work (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 2012).

The largest foreign citizen groups in Finland by nation are from Estonia, Russia, Sweden, Somalia, Thailand, China and Iraq. Considering language, 4.9% (270,000) of Finland's population speaks a first language other than Finnish or Swedish. This group is almost as large as the portion of Swedish speakers in Finland. The biggest foreign language mother tongue groups are Russian, Estonian, Somali, English and Arabic. Numerous other languages are also represented in the labour market and educational institutions (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 2012).

The immigrant population in Finland is heterogeneous from low-educated to highly-educated individuals. Differences in educational background and family situation are reflected on labour market positions (Väänänen et al., 2009). At the end of year 2012, the unemployment of foreign citizens was over two times the rate of the total population (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 2012).

### **Factors Affecting Immigrants' Employment**

Personal, affective and social tendencies in addition to an individual's employment goals and motivation affect job search (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Nevertheless, being self-directed and goal-oriented does not always guarantee success. Even highly-educated immigrants feel a need to compete harder to become employed than the equally educated majority group. Diplomas and certificates from home countries are not always accepted or considered relevant in the host country (in the Netherlands: van Doorn, Scheepers, & Davegos, 2012; in Canada: George et al., 2012). Instead, the most successful factor in gaining employment may be references from another host country employer (George et al., 2012).

Only university education seems to even out labour market differences for people with an immigrant background but entirely host country education (in Sweden: Nekby, Wilhelmsson, & Özcan, 2008). An Irish study shows, however, that minority groups may experience disadvantage in the treatment of their job applications due to their foreign-sounding names (McGinnity & Lunn, 2011). The employers were much less likely to call minority jobseekers to interviews than jobseekers with Irish names but otherwise identical

qualifications. The candidates of presumed immigrant background were discriminated against in spite of their host country education and local language skills.

In a survey about the employability of international graduates from Finnish higher education institutions, there was a special emphasis on three factors in terms of achieving job success in the host country. Besides other job-specific competencies and skills (such as team working and computer skills), local language skills, relevant work experience and attitude were considered critical (Shumilova, Cai, & Pekkola, 2012).

The state of economy has been a significant factor affecting Finnish people's attitudes toward immigrants. During economic well-being attitudes tend to be more positive toward newcomers whereas economic downturns affect attitudes negatively (Jaakkola, 2009). Factors such as outward appearance and skin colour may also contribute to negative attitudes (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010). This may be one of the reasons why immigrants from Somalia and the Arabic countries have met more racism than other immigrant groups in Finland (Somalis in Helsinki, 2013). In addition, religion affects people's judgements. For example Muslim immigrants in many EU countries have faced resistance and unemployment (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010). In spite of a long history of receiving multicultural immigrants, teachers of colour are considered disadvantaged in finding employment in Canada due to discriminatory hiring practices (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). Experiences of discrimination against immigrant teachers based on a foreign name or nationality, language background and skin colour were also reported in a study about immigrant teachers' access and contribution to schools and teaching in the Finnish context (Lefever, Paavola, Berman, Guðjónsdóttir, Talib, & Gísladóttir, 2014).

### **Accommodating to Increasing Immigration in Schools and Teacher Education**

The general climate in Finland is exceptionally favourable to teacher education and education overall and it reflects on the competitiveness of securing a placement in teacher education. Large numbers of applicants and the popularity of teaching as a profession make it possible to provide enough competent and highly motivated teachers for schools (Sahlberg, 2011).

#### **Qualifying Teachers in Finland**

Class teachers are qualified in a five-year programme where students complete a Master's degree in education. Class teachers teach pupils at the primary level in basic education (grades 1–6). Subject teachers typically teach students of the ages 13–19 (grades 7–9 at lower secondary level and in upper secondary school). Subject teachers' qualifications comprise 60 ETCS credits of teachers' pedagogical studies, at least 60 ETCS credits of subject studies and a Master's degree.

Teachers in basic education (primary and lower secondary level) must have excellent speaking and writing skills in the school's teaching language (Palmenia, 2007). 'Excellent' refers to level C2, the highest level in CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference that was established as a calibrating instrument to help align language proficiency levels in Europe; Council of Europe, 2001) and it must be proven by a test or prior education. In upper secondary education teachers are only required to 'master' the teaching language and it is determined by the employer. In mother tongue studies at any school level an excellent command of the language is required (Palmenia, 2007). These strict requirements naturally make it harder for immigrants to gain employment even with teaching qualifications. However, since the decision of 'mastering' the teaching language in the upper

secondary school is left for the employer to define, it can be an opportunity for principals to hire teachers who do not speak Finnish/Swedish at native level but who nonetheless can prove that they manage in the classroom.

In spite of local language courses, immigrants do not always master local language(s) enough to be able to study in the language. Thus educational institutions in Finland have established programmes in English in order to increase the availability of educated work force for different fields. However, learning the language of the new country is an integral issue in gaining work. The demands for adequate language skills in addition to professional skills are well-founded but the demand for excellent speaking and writing skills may be unreasonable compared to one's working task. This issue has been raised from the perspective of discrimination in Finland (Ombudsman for Minorities, 2011). The gatekeeper role of language has been taken into account for example in the new principles of personnel management in the capital of Finland. Instead of overly strict language requirements, the qualifications must be related to the tasks of a particular job. Employees can learn more language while working.

Only a minority of new Finnish teacher graduates secure a permanent position immediately. After a year of graduation, one in five new subject teachers are in full-time permanent positions (Rautopuro, Tuominen, and Puhakka, 2011). Newly-graduated teachers often work shorter fixed-term positions. They may, for example, cover a parental or sick leave and start their careers by substituting in different schools and accumulate teaching experience. Because substitute teachers do not need to be qualified teachers, it is also common in Finland to work either part or full-time while finishing Master's degrees (Rautopuro et al., 2011).

### **Opening the Door for Minority Teachers into Teacher Education**

Besides opportunities, the growth in immigration sets new needs for the schools, which must be taken into account in teacher education. The demographics in the country have changed and this should show in the personnel of the schools as well (Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Santoro, 2013). Most teachers in the Finnish schools represent a Finnish background and thus there is a need for more diversity in school personnel. It is argued that teachers belonging to a minority tend to understand minority students' experiences because of their own experiences of marginalization (e.g. Kohli, 2009). Immigrant teachers can act as role-models for all students regardless of background (Ryan et al., 2009). The presence, experience and expertise of immigrant teachers can help bridge the gap between different background students and alleviate the existence or emergence of damaging stereotypes and othering (Santoro, 2007).

One of the explanations for the shortage of immigrant teachers in Finland lays in the entrance examination to teacher education. A two-tiered entrance exam is used for Finnish-medium class teacher education. The first phase includes a theoretical book that changes yearly and is specifically prepared for the examination. The applicant has to pass the first phase to proceed into the second phase that always includes an interview and aptitude test in Finnish. Both test phases require strong Finnish proficiency, which gives advantage to applicants with Finnish as their first language.

Although the need for teachers with more diverse backgrounds is recognized, not much has been done for changing the situation. One Finnish university has had a special English-medium class teacher education programme since 2005, which has given an opportunity for non-Finnish speakers to participate. The university that gives the backdrop for this study has had different trials to arrange a different entrance exam for students of immigrant background into Finnish-medium class teacher education. However, the different

admission requirements came under scrutiny by the Ombudsman for Minorities and the programmes had to be stopped. It was considered unfair to grant some applicants extra points based on their immigrant background or, for example, a home language other than Finnish.

In order to accommodate non-Finnish speakers in teacher education, an English-medium subject teacher education programme was launched at the university where this study was conducted. The one-year programme gives an opportunity for both international and Finnish students to participate (there is no separate quota for either) and become qualified as a teacher in a humanities or a science subject. This programme sets the context for this study.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted to find out how immigrant graduates from English-medium subject teacher education have fared in establishing themselves in the labour market and how they perceive their employability in Finland.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from two annual cohorts in the English-medium teacher education programme. Seven (out of twelve) graduates in the first cohort and 13 (out of 18) graduates in the second cohort were born outside of Finland, did not have Finnish as first language and moved to Finland as adults. Of these immigrants, seven and nine, respectively, consented to participating in this study. (Although not called ‘immigrants’ in the programme, they agreed to be considered as such for the purposes of this study.) It is these 16 immigrant teachers whose employment situations are reviewed here. The research methods were an online questionnaire and two focus group discussions. The graduates in each cohort were sent requests approximately one year after graduation to fill out an online questionnaire about employment. In the first part of data collection, the questionnaire was sent to the first cohort graduates; about a year later in the third part of data collection, a similar questionnaire was sent to the second cohort graduates. The questionnaires included background questions such as the teachers’ language skills (either their own approximations or based on a test they had taken), reasons for moving to Finland, time lived in Finland, and educational and employment history. Many of the sections had first Yes/No questions with follow-up open-ended questions where the respondents could describe their experiences in more detail. Some questions were directed at those who were employed and separate questions for those who were still job-searching. For example, two Yes/No questions of “Have you found employment (even part-time) after graduating?” and “Did you apply to more than one job before you were hired?” were followed by three open-ended questions of “If you applied for a position before your current job and were not hired, what was given as the reason?”; “If you applied for a position before your current job and were not hired, what do you think the reason was?”; and “How did you find the job search process for you? Could you relate some experiences of your job search process?” The respondents were invited and encouraged to share both successful and unsuccessful job search stories.

The second part of data collection took place after the first questionnaire round. A focus group gathered volunteers to discuss in more detail the employment situations and experiences of job search. The focus group was considered important as a triangulation method in order to glean a more in-depth and more wholesome understanding of the immigrant teachers’ situation as well as to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Cohen,

Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Two one-hour focus groups were organized, each with one teacher graduate from the first cohort (who had already answered the questionnaire) and two then currently teacher students one month away from graduating (from the second cohort who answered the questionnaire the following year). After oral and written instructions, the informants were left alone for the focus group discussion so that interference from the researchers would be minimized. The participants could thus more freely focus on issues that they considered the most significant (Marková, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was used for analysing the questionnaire responses and focus group interviews. An inductive approach to content analysis was employed and both researchers studied the data first independently and searched for emerging patterns and general themes in the responses and transcripts. Next, the researchers compared and discussed their findings together. The data were reduced into summary form, grouped and abstracted through the use of categories that the researchers formulated out of the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It was important to learn to understand and find explanations for the teachers' employment situations and pay attention to what was said, how it was said and why it was said. The factors that the teachers perceived as aids and/or hindrances to their employment in Finland were grouped. The final categories were the scope of teacher qualifications, teaching substitutions, language skills and 'nativeness.'

### **Findings**

This section starts by laying a foundation for the qualitative data by detailing some of the respondents' background and employment information in order to make their perspectives better understandable (Appx. 1; for reasons of anonymity, only partial information is given).

### **Background Information**

The sixteen respondents originated from different countries: one from North America, two from Asia, two from the Middle East, three from South America, and eight from Europe. Ten had moved to Finland because of a relationship with a Finn, five because of studies, and one because of a job offer. The length of time in Finland did not necessarily correlate with higher Finnish/Swedish skills. The graduates either knew no Swedish or their Swedish skills were at emergent level (A1/A2 in CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). Two graduates rated their Finnish skills at A2 level, which is the second lowest level out of the total of six levels. At this basic-user level a person can communicate in simple terms in familiar and routine matters (Council of Europe, 2001). Eight graduates rated their Finnish skills at B1, which is the lower intermediate level in language skills, third out of six from the lowest end. This language skill level allows the person to cope in the most common speech situations and be able to write simple, coherent text on everyday topics (Council of Europe, 2001). Four graduates rated their Finnish skills at B2 which, respectively, is the higher intermediate level in language skills. At this level the person is expected to cope fairly well in a variety of both official and unofficial speech situations (Council of Europe, 2001). Two of the graduates had reached level C1 in Finnish. Level C1 is the second highest CEFR level at which the person can use language flexibly and effectively for different purposes in social, academic and professional circles (Council of Europe, 2001). However, none rated their Finnish (or



Swedish) skills at level C2 that is formally required of a teacher in basic education in Finland. Nevertheless, their Finnish skills may be strong enough for Finnish upper secondary (or adult) education as the requirements there are not necessarily as high (Palmenia, 2007).

After approximately a year of graduation, the employment situations of the graduates varied greatly from no employment to permanent full-time positions. Three graduates (David, Amy and Ella; all names are pseudonyms) were still unemployed (one was on a parental leave and thus had not been actively looking for work). One graduate (Eva) did occasional substitutions as a subject teacher in various schools. Two graduates (Joseph and Mia) had already secured permanent full-time teaching positions. The rest had fixed-term contracts (non-permanent, specified for a certain amount of time). Of these, Sandra, Mark and Ben had full-time, fixed-term contracts. All but one of the employed (Ben) were working in teaching positions. Sandra's job was in English-medium early childhood education.

A full-time (language or science) subject teacher's position in Finland corresponds to 19–21 teaching hours, depending on the subject and level of school. Emily, Mary and Paula had part-time contracts of about 80% of full-time hours. Laura's several contracts made up full-time hours. Carla, Susan and Max had part-time contracts and worked only 4 hours weekly. With rarer teaching subjects (for example small religions, or foreign or home languages that are not so popular/common and that do not have many teaching groups or hours in a school) it is not uncommon that teachers need more than one contract to make up full-time hours or one position consists of hours split up between different schools.

### **Factors Promoting or Hindering Immigrant Teachers' Employability**

The respondents brought up various factors that they perceived as aids or hindrances to their employment. The discussion starts with elaborating on the scope of teacher qualifications, moves onto doing substitutions as a way of gaining access to schools, and continues with deliberations on the language skills and 'nativeness' as a gatekeeper to schools.

#### ***Scope of Teacher Qualifications***

Being qualified and educated in the host country removes the burden of having to acquire acceptance of foreign qualifications which may be an additional barrier in job search (van Doorn et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2009). As Mary put it, it "guarantees [her] being competitive" and made her "equally qualified as the Finnish teacher." Eva, Carla and Susan had prior teaching qualifications from their home countries. Although they could have completed their teacher studies in Finland with fewer credits, they chose to complete them as a full programme.

However, in spite of host country qualifications, almost everyone mentioned factors that could hinder permanent employment. The number of teaching subjects was considered one of the most important factors affecting employment. Most of the teachers were qualified to teach only one subject and many believed that "not having another subject to teach" (Sandra) might hinder them from getting a permanent position. The focus group participants (those marked with a subscript <sub>s</sub> refer to their position as students at the time) had noticed that most of the job openings in job advertisements seemed to be for a teacher with at least two different subjects and this issue was found problematic:

Mia<sub>s</sub>: That's why I'm finding very limiting with most of the ads that I've seen. They are few just solely English teachers. It's English and French or English and Spanish and a lot of English and Swedish and I just kick myself like, God help

me, I studied French four years in high school. I should've kept up with my French now because I really really need it.

The schools in Finland can make up teachers' positions with a combination that suits them. Often, however, subject teachers in secondary schools teach two different subjects. Common combinations for language teachers are two (or three) languages, and for science teachers two science subjects. Teaching positions with only one subject are available in some schools, depending on the subject and the school's needs. It is part of the flexibility and autonomy related to teaching that teachers are not restricted to mandatory combinations during their studies.

The respondents felt pressured to upgrade skills. Continuing with further studies was not easy due to time, family commitments or financial matters. The thought of having to study additional years can be daunting, especially if one is already qualified and out of university. In addition, it is not self-evident that one can obtain a study right for another subject at the university because most need to be applied for through an entrance exam. The extract below shows the concern and anxiety of possibly having to embark on another stretch of studies to gain access to teach another subject:

Ben<sub>s</sub>: It's something that I need to think about seriously, to do some more studies, but God knows I don't want to do another sixty credits of studies. Another full year.

Before applying to teaching positions, Ben was hired in a job in his field of expertise but outside of teaching. Ben and Mark were fortunate to be hired in the first position that they applied to after completing teacher education. Most had to apply to several jobs before success. Since Carla had not managed to secure a proper teaching post a year after graduation, she was studying supplementary Finnish language and culture studies to be able to add Finnish to her teaching repertoire. Max had taken up postgraduate studies.

### *Substitutions Opening the Door?*

The focus group participants considered it important to be active in job search and start looking for work before the completion of teacher education. Eva wished that she had started substituting at schools during her studies to have more experience and to get a head-start for job search. Although worried of not finding employment, Eva felt that substitutions could be important in eventually securing a job. During substitutions she could build her network and get a "foot in the door":

Eva: If you know these schools and you know the principal, you just have to keep calling "so do you need me as a substitute, when could I come." After that it's all pushing if you had already the foot in the door as they say. [...] Just show that your work is that quality which it should be.

Eva mentioned that substitutions could be a way to assure the principals of one's expertise. Although substituting during studies must be balanced with the study load, it can be a good opportunity to start building a network and practice teaching skills. Mia had a temporary post (and a short period of occasional substitutions) before securing her permanent position and she felt the recommendation from her previous principal had helped her:

Mia: My previous boss gave a lovely recommendation because she was impressed with the work I did. I just showed in the interview that I always try my best.

References from substitutions can thus be valuable for (new) teachers since principals may not have an incentive to hire—especially in permanent positions—teachers of whose

work they do not know. Many respondents in this study had several years of teaching experience ranging up to ten years in schools, private institutions or as freelancers. However, prior teaching experience from abroad was rarely given as a reason for helping to gain current employment. Only Emily stated that her prior teaching experience from abroad had helped her in being hired for the current job. “No experience” (Ella) or “not enough teaching experience” (Paula) from either Finland or abroad were, however, stated as a hindrance.

Besides being concerned about competing against Finnish job-seekers, the respondents raised the issue of applying for a position that someone has been managing as a substitute:

- Eva: Because sometimes they took somebody at the time when there wasn't any open official positions so now they are offering him the position but they still have to go public with the position. So, well, it's a pain.
- Ben<sub>s</sub>: Well, you say it's disappointing but look at it from the other guy's point of view and he's been doing that job.
- Carla<sub>s</sub>: It seems quite logical from that guy's point of view.
- Ben<sub>s</sub>: And if he is qualified to do it and the students know him. Okay, it has to be an open position if legally obliged, but I can see from that other guy's point of view as well.

Substitutions (short-term of only a lesson or two to long-term up to a school year) open up for various reasons, for example a sick leave, maternity or parental leave, or other leaves of absence. If the original jobholder decides not to return to the position, it may be opened for a new hire. Although there is no direct line for the substitute to receive the vacant permanent position, for an outsider it may seem so as in the above extract. The participants realized, however, that in this matter they were not in a dissimilar position compared to any other jobseekers. Prior to teacher education, Joseph had been managing a teaching position in an international school in Finland. He needed the qualifications “in order to be appointed” to the post permanently.

Many of the teachers felt frustrated of not finding out the reason for not being hired and not even being invited to interviews. The uncertainty may have made them speculate on the reasons, and language skills were often emphasized.

### *Language and ‘Nativity’ as Gatekeepers*

Most of the teachers experienced that language skills had influenced their job search and job securement, either positively or negatively.

*“(Not) good enough Finnish.”* It comes as no surprise that Finnish language skills were a factor in promoting or hampering employment. Many felt that Finnish skills were beneficial in job search even if they did not apply for a position to teach in Finnish. Others felt disadvantaged from not knowing good enough Finnish. They experienced this already during the application process if they could not submit applications in Finnish.

In the focus group discussions, the role of Finnish was accentuated. Laura was employed while Eva was still looking for a longer-term employment. These starting parameters may have influenced the conversations since Laura was satisfied with her employment and Eva was not. Both Laura and Eva evaluated their Finnish skills at level B1. Laura felt that using Finnish in job interviews had helped her in becoming employed because it was appreciated by the interviewers:

Laura: I haven't done this [language test on Finnish] yet and I don't have this fluency but they really admire you for doing that and I've noticed that most of the time that I got the job it's because I really tried my best to speak it.

Although she was a teacher of English and her first language, Laura felt her Finnish "has actually improved [while] working with kids." By contrast, Eva considered her lack of Finnish skills the main reason for being unemployed. When calling about substitutions, Eva began her phone calls to principals in Finnish. After the introductions she "then asked if it would be okay to continue in English." Although she felt the need to improve her Finnish skills, she conceded she was "so busy subbing that [she had] no time for that." However, she was still worried because of the official language requirements.

Many of the teachers with no work or a position with only limited hours felt they had a big hurdle to cross before they would get their "foot in the door" (Eva; Mia<sub>s</sub>) and get invited to an interview. Although Mia had secured a permanent teaching position in an international school, she yet experienced frustration of not having been "called in to any of the Finnish schools." She would rather teach English as a foreign language than as a mother tongue. She realized, along with others, that not using Finnish in applications may be the reason:

Mia: I think I speak Finnish quite well, but shy away from writing in Finnish. If just based on the written application (which I do in English), I guess I wouldn't be the first one in line for an interview. Finnish people speak such good English that the competition is really high.

Eva brought up the issue of teaching foreign languages through target language. She felt that schools and students are not used to the idea of teaching solely in the target language. She considered it one reason why she had trouble securing a job:

Eva: Teaching English in English is kind of a new concept. I've been substituting now in an [upper secondary school] and they were like "but you need to use some Finnish right?" I was like okay but can I try do it in full English? The kids are so surprised by that as well because they use so much Finnish in the English lesson.

In spite of the years that these teachers had lived in Finland, many felt they had not reached a satisfactory level in Finnish, even if they had a Finnish spouse and a child who spoke Finnish. However, English is widely used in Finnish society which may be a break for immigrants to not learn Finnish. Thus it seemed easy for the participants to find reasons for not taking the time to learn Finnish. They explained that it is very easy to "get away with talking English most of the time no problem." On the other hand, some simultaneously complained that some Finns are quieter when they are expected to speak English with non-Finnish speakers. Therefore, there seemed to be a discrepancy between the expectations of one's own and others' language skills. It was understandable that immigrants felt hesitant about speaking Finnish whereas Finns were criticized for not always speaking English. As Eva said, "it's a big step to actually open your mouth and start speaking Finnish" when one does not feel competent.

When it comes to nationality/ethnicity, no one considered that they would have been discriminated against because of their own origins. Although several teachers had suffered from not knowing "good enough Finnish," it was rarely stated that not being a native Finnish speaker was a hindrance. Two of the teachers, Emily and Susan, thought that "not being a Finn" impaired their employment opportunities. However, Susan had only applied to one position where she was rejected (and did not find out why). Emily only applied "for jobs in teaching environments where [she] can use English also to communicate with parents." Some

of the teachers might underestimate their own Finnish skills if they do not practice them regularly.

*Native versus non-native language skills.* All the teachers employed in international environments reported that their native-speaker status of their first language had benefited them in being hired. For many, the first language was English. On the other hand, seven teachers felt that not being native speakers of English had hindered them from being employed in international English-medium schools. Some had been given that as the official reason at the school where they had applied. Native-like English skills were not enough to be hired in English-medium schools. After being rejected for the reason of not being a native English speaker, Paula changed information on her CV. Pretending to be a native English speaker gave her the edge she needed in securing a job:

Paula: It's hard for an English-teacher in Finland, as English schools won't hire you unless you're a native speaker, and Finnish schools won't hire you unless your Finnish isn't at a near native level. In the end, I added to my CV that I was a native speaker [of English] and that got me the job. A white lie, so to speak.

However, Paula's position was only a 3-month substitution and she decided to move from Finland to look for job opportunities elsewhere. She had her teaching qualifications evaluated and approved by another EU country.

Five teachers (Mary, Laura, Joseph, Susan and Max) had benefited of their first language other than English. Mary thought that especially before reaching a required level in Finnish skills, "it might be beneficial to search for jobs related to your own mother tongue." Immigrant teachers may in fact have an advantage of their first language if it is a language taught in schools as a foreign or home language or if it is used as a teaching language in bilingual/international schools (e.g. English, German, French, Chinese, Spanish). Mary and Max had not yet managed to find work teaching their own subjects but they taught part-time as language teachers.

Children who have a home language other than the schools' teaching language in basic education have a right to two weekly lessons of home language teaching. In Helsinki alone, more than 40 different languages are taught as home languages ([www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi)). Emily taught as an English home language teacher who shuttles between different schools and teaches different groups of students. Susan had so far succeeded in procuring a home language teacher position that only covered two weekly hours in one school. The availability of teaching hours in a home language depends on how many pupils in a municipality sign up for lessons. However, it can be demanding on a teacher to have to transfer between schools and teach classes where students are very heterogeneous (both in age and in their abilities of the home language).

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Most of the factors the immigrant teachers perceived as promoting or hindering their employability can be identical to the ones of Finnish-born teachers. Two or more teaching subjects instead of only one can make a teacher more employable. It is also common for beginning teachers to start their careers by substituting before permanent employment (Rautopuro et al., 2011). However, nativeness and language skills seemed to play a significant role. On the one hand, many immigrant teachers felt they benefited from their native language. On the other hand, without native English skills, teachers of English were not successful in securing work in English-medium international schools. Being native-like in English was not sufficient.

Although *native* Finnish was rarely regarded as a gatekeeper, not possessing *strong enough* Finnish skills was considered one of the main reasons for not gaining access into a Finnish-medium school (cf. Shumilova et al., 2012). Although most of the immigrant teachers had gained employment, even permanent or other full-time positions, they were mostly in international schools. It is important to note that ‘international schools’ do not refer to the schools that the majority of immigrant children attend. Immigrant children usually attend the regular neighbourhood schools with mainstream Finnish students. In other words, none of the teachers in this study had secured a position in teaching a mainstream classroom in Finnish-medium basic or upper secondary education.

What was noticeable in the data was the absence of factors related to discrimination based on ethnicity/nationality or other diversities, other than language skills. No one mentioned factors relating to, for example, outward appearance (cf. e.g. Ryan et al., 2009). However, native language skills are related to nationality, and thus a source of possible discrimination. Although none of the teachers considered themselves discriminated against based on their origin, many were denied of employment in international schools because they were not natives of an English-speaking country. Those who were native English speakers (in some cases, native speakers of another foreign teaching language) were favoured. Thus, it mattered where the teacher was from. As ‘native speaker’ (particularly of English) is a problematic concept nowadays—thanks to increased migration and the spread of English—it should raise some concern among decision-makers.

The lack of “strong enough” Finnish skills can be an easy excuse for employers not to hire in Finnish-medium schools, even if the actual reason is for example a ‘wrong’ nationality, skin colour or religion. Principals of all schools hold a gatekeeper role in hiring teachers to schools as they can start the selection or rejection of applicants already at the point of formulating qualifications for a position (e.g. how many subjects, ‘nativeness’) and differentiating applicants to be invited to interviews (e.g. how are foreign-sounding names treated; McGinnity & Lunn, 2011). Although language skills are essential for teachers, a requisite level of language proficiency is an issue that should be reconsidered at national levels and deliberated from the point of view of discrimination and acceptance of diversity (Ombudsman for Minorities, 2011). The schools and principals need to consider it from the perspective of quality teaching and as gatekeepers of immigrant and non-native teachers entering schools.

The principal’s role as a gatekeeper can for instance surface in their ideas about foreign language teaching. Some language teachers teach solely through the target language while many rely on mother tongue to a great extent. As it is the principals who determine teachers’ language skill requirements in upper secondary schools (‘mastering’ the teaching language), one who believes in teaching through target language might be more willing to hire a teacher who is not a native Finnish speaker. In foreign language teaching an excellent command of the local language can be disputable even at lower secondary level when the goal in language classes should be to use the target language. Are native-like (C2) language skills necessary even for teachers of subjects other than foreign languages in a time when societies need to accommodate “diverse diversities” (see Dervin, 2010, 157), to which different accents belong? In addition, there is a discrepancy between language requirements. In bilingual basic education (in languages other than Finnish/Swedish), teachers’ language competence is determined at level C1 (FNBE, 2005) and thus deemed sufficient for quality teaching.

Having teachers of various backgrounds and languages as role-models can inspire and encourage students to be more confident in using second and foreign languages. It is also essential for all teachers and students regardless of background to learn to see the ‘other’ in themselves in order to see diversity as richness that we are all part of (Dervin & Hahl, 2015).

Nevertheless, the personal responsibility of immigrants to invest in learning the local language(s) cannot be ignored. It does not seem plausible that the need of local language skills would come as a surprise to them. Individual characteristics have been shown to be important predictors of access to jobs (Kanfer et al., 2001; Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010), and thus devoting enough time and effort in learning the local language plays a key role in improving one's employability (Shumilova et al., 2012).

References from substitutions (principals) were also considered important (Shumilova et al., 2012; George et al., 2012). Although continuous substitutions in various schools can be tiring and demanding, they illustrate a person's determination and perseverance. Starting one's teaching career by even short-term substitutions should not be considered a failure or exception but valuable working experience that will hopefully solidify in full-time employment eventually. After the first cohort's data collection had ended, Eva finally secured a one-year teaching post in a Finnish upper secondary school.

This small-scale study has many limitations. It was only based on two cohorts of immigrant teachers and they were only followed until about a year after graduation. While the participants' employment situations ranged from successful permanent employment to stressful unemployment, they cannot be generalized to fit every cohort and context. A longitudinal survey of a larger number of cohorts would be needed to properly gauge long-term employability, especially since the majority of the employed were in temporary positions. Collecting data from principals would shed light on the side of hiring teachers. However, this study gives an indication of immigrant teachers' perceptions of their hindrances of and opportunities for securing teaching positions in the host country.

It also forces actors at university level to consider whether additional support systems should be in place for programmes geared for international students. Does a programme's responsibility extend to giving formal information and advice about employment, or should it also provide better opportunities for building networks for future employment and learning local languages? Although there are language courses available for immigrants, their content is not necessarily fit for academics and it is harder to find courses geared for advanced level speakers. Negotiations with other instances (e.g. language centres) would be beneficial in order to design a local language minor for teachers to study discourse geared for teachers and teaching. One of the goals of educating immigrant teachers is to increase their numbers in mainstream schools in order to diversify the teaching staff (cf. e.g. Santoro, 2013). The results of this study indicate that more work is indeed needed before the goal is realized.

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**Appendix 1.** Employment and background information of the immigrant teachers.

<b>Graduate (Names are pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Contract</b>	<b>Years in Finland</b>	<b>Finnish skills according to CEFR (Council of Europe 2001)</b>	<b>Finished Master's</b>	<b>Prior teaching experience</b>
<b>Mia</b>	Yes	Permanent Full-time	11-15	B2	Yes	Abroad
<b>Joseph</b>	Yes	Permanent Full-time	7-10	A2	Yes	Finland
<b>Mark</b>	Yes	Full-time Fixed-term	11-15	B1	No	Finland
<b>Laura</b>	Yes	Several Together full-time	4-6	B1	No	Abroad
<b>Sandra</b>	Yes	Full-time Fixed-term	7-10	B1	No	Abroad
<b>Ben</b>	Yes	Full-time Fixed-term <i>Not in teaching</i>	11-15	B1	Yes	
<b>Emily</b>	Yes	Part-time 18 h/wk	7-10	B2	No	Abroad
<b>Paula</b>	Yes	Part-time 15 h/wk	3 or less	A2	Yes	Finland
<b>Mary</b>	Yes	Part-time 15h/wk	7-10	B2	Yes	Finland Abroad
<b>Carla</b>	Yes	Part-time 2-4 h/wk	3 or less	C1	Yes	Finland Abroad
<b>Susan</b>	Yes	Part-time 4 h/wk	11-15	C1	Yes	Abroad
<b>Max</b>	Yes	Part-time 4 h/wk	4-6	B1	Yes	Abroad
<b>Eva</b>	Yes	Occasional substitutions	4-6	B1	Yes	Finland Abroad
<b>Amy</b>	No		4-7	B1	Yes	Finland Abroad
<b>David</b>	No		11-15	B1	Yes	Finland Abroad
<b>Ella</b>	No		4-6	B2	Yes	